Building Effective School Teams

The improvement process is sometimes easier than one thinks it is going to be. While change takes time and perseverance, if you have the patience and the will, you can be successful.

<div align="right">Quinn, et al., 1996</div>

T he primary purpose of effective school teams is to create and maintain optimal learning environments for children. The team fosters a school climate in which learning is viewed as a natural and joyful activity and all children are seen as learners, capable of working harmoniously, creatively and productively.

What is a school team? Teams are groups of individuals that share several characteristics:
- Connections among members and coordination of team functions
- Clear role expectations and responsibilities for team members
- Commitment to a common goal or purpose (Quinn et al, 1996)

To be effective, school teams must include all of the adults who work with students including teachers, specialists, non-certified staff, administrators, and school board members.

Teams become a way to pool everyone's wisdom.

Tom Rendon, 1999

While school teams can be instantly created by an administrative order, building effective teams requires time, energy, and commitment. Team members need time and opportunities to build trust, to develop relationships with one another, and to establish roles and responsibilities within the team. Teams must also develop structures and strategies for effective communication among team members and with other educational stakeholders including students, families, and other community members. In addition, teams need to be able to accept divergent opinions, resolve conflict, and make decisions in a timely manner. Team building is a continuing effort as teams evaluate their own functioning and movement toward their primary purpose of school improvement.

Effective school teams are able to:
- Articulate the school and/or school district's vision
- Formulate a plan, set goals, and assess their progress as they work to achieve that vision
- Communicate and collaborate effectively within the team and with students, families and other members of the community
- Work together to get necessary resources for themselves and their students
- Evaluate their own effectiveness
- Accept accountability for their actions

Effective school teams function as a whole, and individual team members are both accountable to one another and to the team. "Success or failure is a team event. No outside obstacle is an excuse for team failure, and no individuals fail. Only the team can fail" (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993).

Common barriers to the creation of effective school teams include:

- Administrations not fully committed to the organizational changes required to support a team environment
- Implementation of teams without first addressing the issue of trust
- Unrealistic expectations, including underestimating the time needed to build an effective team (Rendon, 1999)

Effective school teams benefit the staff involved, their school, and the community. Most importantly, effective teams create schools in which the primary focus is helping children learn.

References

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